

Asbury Park Press - February 21, 2009

By Erik Larsen

TOMS RIVER - Rep. John H. Adler, D-N.J., said Ocean County's transportation infrastructure has been neglected for too long and he intends to call on Congress to help modernize inadequate roads and weakened bridges.

"For a generation, the county has not had its infrastructure needs met, which means the roads are too crowded, there are people sitting too long (in traffic), and inadequate roads and bridges," said Adler, who succeeded Republican Jim Saxton in the House last month.

Adler hosted a kind of transportation summit at Town Hall Friday afternoon with about 50 mayors and other municipal leaders from throughout the Ocean County portion of Adler's 3rd Congressional District.

The congressman was joined by state Transportation Commissioner Stephen Dilts at a two-hour meeting closed to the public and reporters. Adler's office explained that it wanted to provide an atmosphere where participants could be candid without fear about how their questions or comments might be interpreted in public.

After the meeting, officials said the big issue discussed was a delayed 2014 date for reconstruction of the four Route 72 bridges that link Long Beach Island with the mainland in Stafford. Adler said he is going to press to move up that timeline.

In 2004, the state concluded the spans were safe but in "poor structural condition" and needed to be either extensively refurbished or entirely rebuilt.

"There is a real consensus here within the county, of people who want to make that happen sooner," Adler said. "They understand the urgency from an economic point of view and from a potential safety point of view; that a second bridge to get people onto the island and more importantly, if necessary, quickly off the island. And so, I'm going to work with (state) legislators and local officials to try to make that happen."